

CHAPTEE

VII. 1806.

The Continental system — General indignation excited by it — Sale of licenses by the French Government — Custom-house system at Hamburg — My letter to the Emperor — Cause of the rupture with Russia — Bernadotte's visit to me — Trial by a court-martial for the purchase of a sugar-loaf — Davoust and the captain "rapporteur" — Influence of the Continental system on Napoleon's fall.

I HAVE a few remarks to make on the famous Continental system, which was a subject of such engrossing interest. I had, perhaps, better opportunities than any other person of observing the fraud and estimating the fatal consequences of this system. It took its rise during the war in 1806, and was brought into existence by a decree, dated from Berlin. The project was conceived by weak counsellors, who, perceiving the Emperor's just indignation at the duplicity of England, her repugnance to enter into negotiations with him, and her constant endeavors to raise enemies against France, prevailed upon him to issue the decree, which I could only regard as an act of madness and tyranny. It was not a decree, but fleets, that were wanting. Without a navy it was ridiculous to declare the British Isles in a state of blockade, *whilst the English fleets were in fact blockading all the French ports.* This declaration was, however, made in the Berlin Decree. This is what was called the Continental system ! which, in plain terms, was nothing but a system of fraud and pillage.

One can now scarcely conceive how Europe could for a single day endure that fiscal tyranny which extorted exorbitant prices for articles which the habits of three centuries had rendered indispensable to the poor as well as to the rich. So little of truth is there in the pretence that this system had for its sole and exclusive object to prevent the sale of English goods, that licenses for their disposal were procured at a high